BREAKFAST IN SZPROTAWA

Stendhal in the Szprotawa Region

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STENDHAL, BY OLOF JOHAN SÖDERMARK, 1840 (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS).

Marie-Henri Beyle (pen name **Stendhal**) was a famous French writer of the Romantic era and a precursor of realism in literature. His greatest popularity came from the novels *The Red and the Black* and *The Charterhouse of Parma*. In 1813, as a Napoleonic army intendant assigned to the Duchy of Żagań, he stayed in **Szprotawa.** This is an almost completely unknown episode in the town's history. For Stendhal enthusiasts scattered around the world, every newly uncovered biographical detail about the writer is considered sensational.

Beyle arrived in Szprotawa under rather unusual circumstances. During the temporary suspension of hostilities between Napoleon and the coalition forces, he was sent to Żagań as a military intendant. Along the way, he stopped in Szprotawa. As he noted in his journal on **June 10th, 1813:** *„Breakfast in Szprotawa around one o'clock with Messrs. Carre, Moras, and Macar."*[1]

De Moras was the intendant in Zielona Góra, and Macar was the intendant of the 2nd Corps of General Sebastiani in Kożuchów. The mentioned Carre is most likely de Carne-Coëtlogon, who had been appointed intendant in Szprotawa — something he personally informed Beyle of just after receiving the nomination. They knew each other and were appointed auditors in the Council of State at the same time.[2]

[1] L.Sługocki, *Stendhal w Żaganiu w 1813 roku*, cz. I, Łódź 2011, s. 26.
[2] There, s. 24.

FORMER HEADQUARTERS IN SZPROTAWA (ARCH.)

„The day I became intendant in Żagań began with the overturning of my carriage at half-past midnight… I arrived in Żagań on the 10th at four in the afternoon. That was the beginning of my rule.”[3]

During the armistice, **General Bertrand**, along with the staff of the 4th Army, was quartered in Szprotawa. He occupied a townhouse at 17 Herrnstrasse (today Anders Street), where — according to the memoirs of Heinrich Laube — Napoleon himself visited him.[4] Bertrand was one of Napoleon's favorite generals and later accompanied him into exile on St. Helena.[5]

On **July 2nd, 1813**, Beyle complained in his diary about Bertrand: *„ …I am not satisfied with General Bertrand; his chief of staff is an imbecile, and besides, I see that he complained to the general that the previous day I had not arrived quickly enough.”* The chief of staff mentioned was General Delort. This note suggests that Beyle may have visited Szprotawa multiple times on official business.[6]

A letter from Bertrand to his wife Fanny, dated **July 27th, 1813** from Henryków near Szprotawa, has survived.[7] At the height of the epidemic, the general may have temporarily stayed at Henryków Palace.

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[3] Stendhal, *Dziennik*, wybór, PIW 1973, s. 342.
[4] M.Boryna, *Napoleon Bonaparte w Szprotawie. Zdumiewające relacje Heinricha Laubego*, Muzeum Ziemi Szprotawskiej 2025, https://archive.org/details/napoleon-bonaparte-w-szprotawie.-zdumiewajace-relacje-heinricha-laubego.-by-maci/mode/2up [dostęp 22.10.2025].
[5] H.Szczegóła, *Z przeszłości Szprotawy*, [w:] Rocznik Lubuski, t. II, 1960, s. 108.
[6] L.Sługocki, *Stendhal w Żaganiu…,* s. 34.
[7] L.A.S. «Bertrand», Sprotsdorf près Sprottau 27 juillet [1813], à sa femme, Fanny BERTRAND ; 2 pages in-4 (petite fente à un pli, onglet), www.aguttes.com/lot/107348/13560888?search=& [dostęp 22.10.2025].

PALACE HENRYKÓW NEAR SZPROTAWA TODAY.

In Żagań, where Beyle took over as intendant, he wrote on July 16: *„There is a nervous, malignant, strange fever here, which for several months has taken 400 people."* He himself began to feel unwell on July 4. It was most likely a **typhus epidemic.** He wrote: *„My anxiety was increased by the absence of a good doctor; I ordered twice to have one fetched from eight miles away, but other duties kept him…"*[8]

According to Leszek Sługocki, Beyle was treated by a French military doctor who came from eight miles away — most likely from Szprotawa.[9] The illness plunged Beyle into a melancholy mood. He pondered death and drank herbal infusions made from some marsh plants as treatment.

As for the doctor, it is considered nearly certain that he served in **Wiechlice** near Szprotawa. The French-Italian military hospital there housed **500–700 patients**. Infectious diseases, including typhus, were treated there. Felix Matuszkiewicz also mentions military hospitals (lazarettos) in Szprotawa located in the rifleman's house, the monastery, and the brickyard. About **120 soldiers and residents** who died were buried in mass graves near the Corpus Christi church in Szprotawa, commemorated by a monument on the eastern wall of the church.[10]

Beyle left Żagań on **July 27th, 1813.** He was very weak, having only recovered from fever four days earlier. According to Sługocki, he traveled by coach along the route to Szprotawa, Bolesławiec, then to Zgorzelec and Bautzen. He reached Dresden the next day.[11] Although in a later publication, Sługocki was no longer certain that the route passed through Szprotawa.[12]

[8] There, s. 53,
[9] L.Sługocki, *La maladie de Stendhal ă Sagan en 1813*, [w:] Histoire des sciences mēdicales, Trimestriel – Tome V – No 1 – Mars – Avril 1971.
[10] F.Matuszkiewicz, *Geschichte der Stadt Sprottau*, Sprottau 1908, s. 151.
[11] L.Sługocki, *Stendhal w Żaganiu…,* s. 123.
[12] L.Sługocki, *Henri Beyle (Stendhal) opuszcza Żagań*, Łódź 2015, s. 7-8.

Thus, Szprotawa now officially appears on the map of places where **Stendhal** stayed. This is important not only for Stendhal scholars but also for the town itself from the perspective of biographical tourism.

It is said that Stendhal (1783–1842) was ahead of his time. His work was understood by only a few during his lifetime. He himself said: *„I will be understood around the year 1880."* From the late 19th century onward, interest in his works revived and continues today.

Greetings from Szprotawa to the members and supporters of the World Stendhal Club!

MARKET SQUARE AND TOWN HALL IN FORMER SZPROTAWA (ARCH.)